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ABSTRACT

This report describes the problems which prompted the Yale University Library to request Higher Education Act (HEA) grants from the federal government, and recounts the accomplishments achieved through the receipt of those grants. HEA funds were given to the Manuscripts and Archives department for the preservation and resurveying of historical manuscripts, and the the Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings for the dubbing of 2500 shellac records and 350 cylinder recordings onto tape. (FM)

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YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY HEA-TITLE II-C GRANT

by

Donald Marshman

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The 1976 amendment to the federal Higher Education Act established "a program of grants to major research libraries to assist them in maintaining and strengthening their research collections and in making available their collections to other libraries and users not connected with the applicant institution."

Two early grants under the program - - whose official title is "HEA II-C" - - went to the Yale University Library, to underwrite two-year projects in two separate departments of the Library.

Together the grants amounted to $309,790. The following account describes why they were needed and what they accomplished.

At Yale University, in locked recesses within the majestic collegiate-gothic Sterling Memorial Library, lies one of the world's greatest collections of non-literary manuscripts. Under accumulation for nearly 250 years, it includes more than 1,100 separate holdings of papers of individuals and families, numbering perhaps 55,000,000 documents and occupying some 18,000 linear feet of shelf space well over three miles.

For Yale professors and graduate students, this vast paper mine has long been a virtually limitless source of raw material for Ph.D dissertations and advanced scholarly works: the magnet which first attracted many of them to New Haven. Even so, most of the collection's traffic comes from outside Yale, including numerous scholars from abroad, while many others consult it at second hand, through correspondence and printed guides.

Like any large collection, Yale's has its jewels, among them the diaries, correspondence and other papers of Henry L. Stimson (1867-1950), a member of four presidential cabinets over a span of 35 years, and of Edward M. House (1858-1938), President Wilson's closest diplomatic advisor and personal envoy during World War I and the 1919 Paris peace conference. These collections, augmented by the papers of such more recent luminaries as Walter Lippmann (1889-1974), Dean Acheson (1893-1971), Charles A. Lindbergh (1902-74) and Chester Bowles (1901-), make Yale a key resource, consulted by scholars from all over the world, on the national and international political history of the twentieth century.

The obvious significance of collections like these makes them relatively easy for the university's Manuscripts and Archives Department to deal with. Occasionally they arrive accompanied by funds to underwrite their careful examination, arrangement, description and cataloguing by archivists. The frequency with which they are consulted both requires and justifies continuing expenditure to keep their components, especially important letters, in a good state of preservation or, where necessary, to replace them with photocopied or microfilmed duplicates. As a result, scholars and investigators can locate exactly what they want without lengthy sifting. Since documents can be specified and copies ordered by mail, full access is relatively easy even at long distance.

But what about lesser collections - - lesser in size and obvious significance and usually donated without supporting funds? Like most universities in this inflationary era, Yale has a budget under continuing severe pressure, and the kind of project associated with Manuscritps and Archives tends to get deferred. Perhaps more money will be available next year. Meanwhile, the papers won't go away.

For most collections, however, postponement leads to loss from deterioration. This is inevitable even for letters and diaries written on the durable rag-content paper used almost universally until the late nineteenth century. For twentieth century collections, prolonged deferral of preservative treatment is much more serious. Consisting almost entirely of highly acid wood-pulp papers and often stored long ago in wood-pulp folders and boxes which are themselves acidic, they actively decay even when left untouched.

This problem is magnified by the much greater size of modern collections, stemming especially from the invention and wide use of carbon paper. For example, the papers of John W. Davis (1873-1955), the constitutional lawyer and 1924 Democratic presidential candidate, include 17,000 letters which in time disintegrated so completely that Yale had to close the collection so that they could be individually photocopied before they crumbled away altogether. Yet the Davis papers measure only 118 linear feet. A later collection equally prone to deterioration, the personal papers of New York City's recent mayor, John V. Lindsay (1921-), occupies 435 feet of shelf space, while the papers of a recent ambassador and congressman, Ogden R. Reid (1925-), measure nearly 1,000 feet.

With physical loss, actual and potential, goes intellectual loss as well. The riches of collections left unexamined for decades, in many cases since their original reception, are lost to a world which might value and make good use of them - - for the world has no idea that the riches are there.

A final complication is that the gravitational pull exerted by great repositories like Yale causes their holdings continually to expand. As new gifts and bequests come in, the total of uncompleted projects keeps mounting.

At Yale, late in 1977, Lawrence E. Dowler, Associate Librarian for Manuscripts and Archives, concluded that the situation was beginning to get out of hand.

Dowler believed that all of his department's historical manuscript collections needed to be checked for preservation purposes and resurveyed as to content. During the academic year just completed, 1976-77, the staff of the Manuscripts and Archives Department had given detailed processing of this kind to 1,271 linear feet of material - - preparing over 600 pages of lists, registers and other guides in the course of the effort - - and less complete treatment to a further 400 feet. Concurrently, however, the department had acquired through donations an additional 783 linear feet of new material which needed to be processed from scratch. At that rate of net progress Yale's manuscript collection would not become wholly accessible according to the standards of modern scholarship until the twenty-first century, by which time much of it would have rotted away.

Convinced that drastic action was needed on behalf of a significant national asset and aware that help on an adequate scale simply could not be provided by Yale's budget, Dowler proposed to his superiors, Rutherford Rogers and Donald B. Engley, respectively the University Librarian and Associate University Librarian, that outside help be sought.

Meanwhile, Rogers and Engley were facing a similar situation in another library department, the Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings.

Founded in 1961 to collect, preserve and make available for study sound recordings in the fields of Western classical and theatre music, poetry and literature, history and politics, the HSR Collection had grown to include more than 100,000 recordings, among them such rarities as Debussy, Elgar, Grieg and

Charles Ives playing their own works, speeches by Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, Tennyson reading Tennyson and Joyce reading Joyce. Though initially viewed with skepticism as an academic resource, HSR had been for some years the object of a growing scholarly interest in non-literary, "direct" source material. Several Yale courses had been organized around the collection and during 1976-77 it had served more than 5,000 users, nearly half of them not connected with Yale.

The largest category of HSR holdings requiring preservation consisted of some 2,500 recordings of radio broadcasts of the 1930s, '40s and '50s. In that heyday of big-time radio most programs were "live" and usually disappeared into the void after a single broadcast unless an interested individual took the trouble to record them. One who did was the celebrated American baritone Lawrence Tibbett, who on such programs as the Bell Telephone Hour brought to millions the experience of classical and semi-classical vocal music, especially arias from grand opera.

Tibbett regularly arranged to have his radio performances recorded (an engineer connected the necessary equipment to a radio set and tuned in the program). Scores of these recordings are now in Yale's hands: a rare and uniquely extensive preservation of the work of a major popular artist under in-performance conditions. Each is an original, however, and accurate copying has only recently become possible. Having been made on acetate or lacquer-coated "shellac" discs, the Tibbett recordings - - and all the others in the radio-broadcast collection as well - - not only are fragile but usually lose significant quality and fidelity with each replaying. The curator of the HSR collection, Richard Warren, Jr., had reluctantly ruled that until preservation copying could be arranged, the entire collection was no longer to be played.

For similar reasons Warren had been forced to apply the same rule to two other collections within HSR. The earlier, dating from the dawn of sound recording, consists of 350 highly fragile cylinder recordings, many on wax, of arias and lieder by early twentieth century opera and concert artists such as John McCormack, and statements or recitations by personages as dissimilar as Sarah Bernhardt and Pope Leo XIII.

The more recent collection originated in the early days of tape recording, the late 1950s and early '60s, before deterioration-prone acetate tape was replaced by the sturdier polyester tape of today. Made up of 1,300 or so tapes of radio broadcasts - - chiefly musical performances and interviews with such personages as Fritz Kreisler, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Thornton Wilder - - it also includes, among other unpublished rarities, the voices of many important modern poets reading their own works: W.H. Auden, John Betjeman, Sylvia Plath, Delmore Schwartz, Mark Van Doren and others.

Finally, HSR had an archive of its own to be preserved: a collection of more than 3,000 manufacturer's catalogues of phonograph records, many from the first two decades of the twentieth century, including an extensive holding of catalogues issued by European recording companies between the world wars. Intended like most such publications to have a short life, the catalogues had been printed on cheap, acidic paper and were beginning to decompose. Yale was particularly anxious to copy them because the data they contained was essential both for scholarly study and for assistance in the compilation of a massive "union catalogue" of phonograph recordings. The purpose of this project - - a joint effort of the Library of Congress, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of the New York Public Library and the university libraries of Stanford and Syracuse, as well as Yale - - is to create a computerized information bank which will list the pertinent data

on every phonograph record commercially issued anywhere during the last 90 years that still survives in any of the five libraries.

As Dowler and Warren described the problems and needs of the collections in their charge, it became clear to Rogers and Engley that immediate action needed to be taken. Dowler then proposed that Yale apply for a grant from Washington under the new HEA II-C program of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (now Health and Human Services), which recently had received definitive publication in the Federal Register (issue of December 28, 1977). He cited the passage quoted at the beginning of this article, pointing out how closely the regulation's purpose appeared to fit the needs of both Manuscripts and Archives and Historical Sound Recordings.

Agreement was quickly reached among the four, even though the preparation of a grant application would require considerable investment of time and effort, and no precedents existed for the kinds of proposals and funding levels that would find favor in Washington.

The final application ran to 61 single-space typed pages. It requested $236,520 for M & A and $73,270 for HSR to cover two years of work, including the hiring of five in staff under Dowler and Warren.

After pointing out that the two projects, if approved, would make vast amounts of hitherto unavailable knowledge widely accessible not only to individuals but to other libraries, educational institutions and broadcasting and record companies as well, the application ended with a flourish: "The collections which Yale wishes to save through the proposed grant are saved for the world as much as for Yale."

Perhaps because Yale's submission was among the first under HEA II-C, response was swift as such things go and also affirmative, with full funding provided, though only for one year. By October 1978 the new staff had been hired and both projects were ready to move forward.

"We began with what was nearest," says Susan Grigg, the day-to-day supervisor of the Manuscripts and Archives project. "When we unlocked a storage vault, we usually started with the top left-hand shelf and worked our way right around the room. To make judgments among collections and deal with the most important ones first would have slowed us up. The vital thing was coverage: to get at least a look at everything so we could save whatever might be in danger of decomposing. First and foremost, we ran a rescue operation."

Within this framework, priorities of course emerged. The highest was given to the smallest collections of manuscripts, those occupying one foot of shelf space or less. Almost without exception they consisted of family and personal papers of clergy, educators including many women schoolteachers, businessmen and miscellaneous Yale graduates - - "a nineteenth century hash," in the words of John Espy, one of the surveyors. The intent was to examine and process each such collection on a once-and-for-all basis - - checking it against any existing cataloguing or descriptions, making copies of any deteriorating items, putting everything in acid-free folders and boxes, listing the different subjects touched or in the papers, and noting these last for future entry in a series of subject guides to the entire Manuscripts and Archives collection which will be prepared in the future as time permits.

Once these steps had been taken, a small collection was considered to be "fully processed" - - and unlikely to receive further staff examination for a

long time to come. With this in prospect, the papers in the smaller collections were looked at especially closely - - and though most proved predictably unremarkable, a number of unexpected finds began to turn up.

The Terry- Slocomb family papers, for instance - - occupying a modest eight inches on the shelf - - had been known to contain many letters by William Terry, M.D., and his sister Esther, a nurse. What had not been known was that both had spent the bulk of the Civil War attending to wounded soldiers in U.S. Army hospitals and graphically described this experience in their letters.

A different kind of surprise turned up in the ten inches of Bacon-Schneeloch family papers. Never previously processed, the letters in it were assumed to deal chiefly with the careers of the Schneeloch Sisters, a pair of now-forgotten nineteenth century singers. Instead, the letters almost exclusively record the bitter opposition of the Bacon family, long prominent in the annals of New Haven, Yale and the Protestant ministry, to Leonard Woolsey Bacon, Jr.'s marriage to the semi-cultivated daughter of a German immigrant. More than 27 feet of fully processed papers of the main branch of the Bacon family had long been in Yale's possession. Owing perhaps to careful culling before the collection was donated, they contained no reference to this painful betrayal of propriety and social position by a prime exemplar of old Yankee stock.

What will probably prove more significant than any single find in the hundreds of small collections are the insights into the past which they together make possible. With the help of the new guides, researchers into, say, nineteenth century courtship and child-rearing, or the daily lives of preachers, or social activities like theatre-going and experimenting with phrenology will

now be able to examine a single topic from dozens of different perspectives, using M & A as the sole resource.

Among the larger collections, many which had never been completely processed turned out to be surprisingly significant sources of background data on subjects of current concern.

In the papers of William Kent (1864-1928), a two-term Congressman from California, friend of the great naturalist, John Muir, and owner of thousands of acres in Marin County, the beginnings of conservation in the American West can be traced. The correspondence of a New Haven lawyer of inexhaustible energy named George Dudley Seymour (1859-1945) approaches conservation in its urban aspects. Seymour was an early advocate of city planning and actively corresponded on the subject with such luminaries as Gifford Pinchot and the architect Cass Gilbert, designer of New York's Woolworth Building. Also a lover of the arts, he numbered William Dean Howells, Vachel Lindsay and John LaFarge among his correspondents. A series of letters written to Seymour by Cecilia Beaux, a prominent society portrait-painter of the twentieth century's first quarter, turns out to deal with a matter of intense contemporary interest: the career of a woman in a field traditionally dominated by men.

As the months passed and M & A's grant was renewed for a second year, individual items of interest and value kept turning up which mysteriously had found their way into a collection without leaving any record. Some of these came from the Theatre Manuscripts Collection: letters by Edwin Booth, P.T. Barnum, Lola Montez, Lillian Russell and Bram Stoker, the author of Dracula. Even harder to explain was what had happened to the papers of Yale's own fifteenth president, Charles Seymour (1885-1963), a distinguished historian

who was one of the university's dominant figures during the first half of the twentieth century. Although they had been processed a few years earlier, they were found never to have been entered in the Yale Library's catalogue.

Meanwhile, two floors above the vaults, in a room furnished with newly purchased recording equipment, the material on the 2,500 shellac records was being transferred ("dubbed") to a permanent set of master tapes. The surveyor in charge, Lloyd Smith, came to the job with a uniquely useful set of credentials. As a trained and experienced music librarian, he could readily provide correct identifications for the many records in the collection whose labels had been lost or which were identified only by the singer or instrumentalist and not by the music performed.

Musically, the recordings to be dubbed ranged from symphonic broadcasts conducted by Arturo Toscanini's protege Guido Cantelli through the Tibbett performances to songs played and sung by Cole Porter to publicize musical comedies whose scores he had written. One of the most important groups of recordings was not musical, however, but dramatic: a complete set of the Theatre Guild on the Air radio broadcasts, a weekly series of 60-minute versions of well-known plays performed by well-known players which began in 1947 and terminated with the eclipse of radio by television, in 1953.

Only two sets of professional recordings of these celebrated programs had been made. The one which went to the sponsor, United States Steel, has not survived. The remaining set had gone to the Theatre Guild, which produced the series, and from there, through the Guild's attorney, H. William Fitelson, had been donated to Yale. They amount to more than 300 hours of unduplicated

material which include many performances of exceptional interest, among them several by Broadway stars recreating their most memorable Broadway roles: Raymond Massey in Abe Lincoln in Illinois, Clifton Webb in Blithe Spirit, John Gielgud in The Importance of Being Earnest. Curiosities also abound: Humphrey Bogart as Lieutenant Frederick Henry in Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms and a minor comedy called Page Miss Glory in which Ronald Reagan plays the romantic lead.

The gems of the collection, however, are nine or ten performances by the celebrated husband-and-wife acting team of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontane. The Lunts, who dominated the American theatre for three decades beginning in the mid-1920s, made only one film and few television appearances. In the Theatre Guild broadcasts, however, they recreated almost a dozen of their greatest Broadway successes, from Elizabeth the Queen to O Mistress Mine. The recordings are thus the chief remaining evidence of their effervescent and highly polished acting style. Almost as much worth treasuring are five performances by a contemporary of the Lunts, the English comedienne and musical comedy star Gertrude Lawrence. She, too, made few films and died before the advent of television, but a voice and manner which charmed millions on both sides of the Atlantic are preserved in the collection's recordings. (Because of reproduction restrictions in the original broadcast contracts, these performances can be listened to only at Yale.)

Dubbing the records required a full year. The acetate tapes were dubbed in the second year of the project, by Yale's Audio-Visual Department. Last of all came the dubbing of the 350 cylinder recordings, delayed because equipment to do the job properly had to be designed (by expert George Blacker). The crumbling

collection of record catalogues has been reproduced entirely on microfilm, requiring almost 120,000 separate photographs. As a result of these steps, the history of the first 90 years of sound recording has been enriched by many hitherto unknown details and, more notably, several thousand hours of broadcasts and performances by dozens of outstanding artists and famous personages, which in most cases would otherwise have been lost, now are permanently preserved and easily available to listeners.

The work accomplished in Manuscripts and Archives can be described best in statistical terms. During the two years of the grant, all 1,100 historical manuscript collections in the department were worked on. Hundreds were newly encased in acid-free boxes and many others were rearranged or relabeled or received new registers or cataloguing. Meanwhile, more than 185,000 different items in varying stages of decomposition were copied on the project's Xerox machine and 165,000 were microfilmed.

Several hundred collection guides have been created or revised and a number of newsletters describing individual collections have been distributed to the academic world. Yale's collection has also slightly decreased in size. As small sets of papers were discovered which logically belonged with larger holdings deposited in other libraries, Yale has made gifts of them, with Harvard and the Library of Congress the most frequent beneficiaries.

Much remains to be done, of course, especially in identifying the precise content of each set of papers and interpreting its lessons and points of interest for this and future generations. But that is for scholars to do. Prior to the HEA II-C grant the likelihood was strong that much of Yale's collection would

turn to dust long before the scholars could investigate it. Now, thanks to the grant, the deterioration has been stopped short; much more is known about what is in the collection, and access by both individuals and institutions has become much easier than it was.

Dowler, who first proposed applying for the grant, is understandably pleased at how it has worked out. "It wasn't simply a matter of saving some musty old papers and dusty old records and tapes," he says. "Because of the grant we've been able to preserve aspects of American civilization which exist nowhere else and otherwise would have been lost. In the process we've brought them closer to the surface, where they can more easily be seen and understood. If our country's civilization is important, then that's important."